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THE CONCEPT OF SOUL IN JAINISM

In any system of Philosophy, the concept of soul or “self” occupies a very important place since Philosophy attempts to analyse the nature of soul and lift the soul from the lower plane to the higher plane. The aim of Philosophy is to discover “Who am I?” and to show the path to live Divine life – holy life – pure life in the best possible order. This is quite true with major philosophical systems of India including Jainism and Buddhism. It is, therefore, no wonder that the concept of soul has been properly studied in the metaphysics of any philosophical school. Jainism is no exception in this respect.

Jainism is still a living religion in India and it has the antiquity and influenced the Indian thought for a long time. In the history of Indian philosophy Jainism alongwith Cārvāka system and the Buddhism is grouped under the heterodox system. But this is not true. Jainism cannot be stamped as a Nāstika system since Jainism does not believe in materialism as found in Cārvāka school, on the contrary it does not maintain that there is no life after death or death is the end of life. Moreover, full faith in the doctrine of Karma and that of transmigration of souls are considered to be the foundation of Jainism. It is equally true that Jainism does not accept the authority of the Vedas or believe in the sacrifices, etc. This should not lead to the conclusion that Jainism is purely materialistic and there is a lot of speculative thought on the concept of soul in the Jain philosophy. It does not deny the very existence of soul and implicitly believes that each soul is

responsible for his own fate and the ethical living can ensure leasting happiness to the soul.

With this brief background of Jainism in general, we may study the concept of Soul in Jainism in details. The "soul" is defined as an entity conceived as the cause or vehicle of the bodily life and psychical activities of individual persons, the soul is assumed to exist as a spiritual substance in rather sharp antithesis to material substance¹. Fundamentally a soul is the life of a body and it is considered as an indestructible eternal entity in Indian philosophy including Jainism. The above mentioned definition of soul is applicable to the "soul" in Jainism.

In metaphysics, reality is the cardinal principle which includes in it a general philosophy of life and definite view of the universe. This outlook forms as integral part of the philosophical system. Coming to Jainism, an understanding of Reality consists in comprehending consciousness and matter because both of them have existence. Therefore, Jainism divides the universe into two principles of Jīva and Ajīva – conscious and unconscious aspects of the Reality. Jīva denotes everything that lives and moves in any embodiment, feels pleasure or pain of external things in nature with which it comes into contact and it is thus sentient thinking and willing, whereas Ajīva is an insentient matter. The Jain concept of life is very extensive, almost the whole world with its gross elements and vegetation, being instinct with life. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan rightly says that *caitanya* or consciousness is the essence of Jīva². Moreover, the Soul or Jīva is the enjoyer. Souls are different from matter and material things. In Jainism, the word Jīva is used variously, it denotes life, vitality and souls are infinite in number and they are of many kinds. Souls are not of definite size since, it is believed that they contract or expand according to the dimension of the body, in which they are incorporated for the time being.

Souls are of two kinds viz. *samsārins* or mundane and *mukatas* or liberated. The first one viz. mundane souls are subject to the cycle of births. In case of liberated souls, Jainism speaks of 15 varieties of them. The liberated souls of *siddhas* are free from the bondage of

1. For details see *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*.

2. *History of Indian Philosophy* (1929), vol. I, p. 296.

karma and they are as under: (1) Tīrthaṅkara Siddha, who are prophets before liberation. (2) Atīrthaṅkāra Siddha, who were not perfect before liberation. (3) Tīrtha Siddha, liberated after the establishment of the Jain order. (4) Atīrtha Siddha, liberated before the establishment of the Jain order. (5) Grihaṅga Siddha, liberated as a house-holder without becoming a monk. (6) Anyaṅga Siddha, liberated without conversion to Jainism. (7) Svaliṅga Siddha, liberated as a Jain monk. (8) Purusaliṅga Siddha, liberated as male. (9) Strīliṅga Siddha, liberated as a woman. (10) Napuṃsakaliṅga Siddha, liberated as neither a male nor a female. (11) Buddhabodhita Siddha liberated by the knowledge imparted by a teacher. (12) Pratyeka Buddha Siddha, liberated by self-intuition revived at the sight of a certain thing. (13) Svayaṃ Buddha Siddha, liberated by enlightenment obtained by himself without help of anyone. (14) Eka Siddha, liberated singly. (15) Aneka Siddha, liberated alongwith other souls³. This classification of Siddha souls as enunciated in Jainism is quite novel and it speaks of different grades of such souls though all of them are designated as *siddhas* or liberated. Such a detailed description of liberated souls is not dealt with in any religious system. In this respect Jainism deserves the attention.

The term Jīva does not refer to the human soul alone. It refers to the principle of consciousness in general and this consciousness is discernible in four different states of existence viz. *gati*. These different levels of consciousness are four in number, (1) of animals, (2) of human beings, (3) of infernal beings, (4) of celestial beings. In every one of these levels or stages the soul undergoes change though its identity is not lost. In fact, these changes are seen in the facts of birth, growth and death. Jainism also speaks of *aśuddha jīvas* which are classified into two types. The non-moving are considered to be one-sensed and are of five types, living, respectively in the bodies of earth (*prithvīkāya*) water (*apkāya*) fire (*tejaskāya*) air (*vāyukāya*) and vegetable (*vanaspatikāya*). The finer types cannot be perceived by the sense organs. The moving *jīvas* are classified into the two sensed,

3. For details see *Sīrisirivālakahā*, verses 1.377, edited by N.G. SURU (1932), pp. 45-46.

three sensed, four sensed and the five sensed. Two sensed *jīvas* are worms shells, etc. three sensed are bugs, ants, moths, four sensed are bees, flies and five sensed *jīvas* are of three types. Aquatic animals such as fishes, dolphins, terrestrial animals such as elephants and air-animals such as gees. The *Tattvārtha sūtra* defines the reasoning beings are those endowed with an inner sense (II.25). The five sensed animals are womb-born such as goats, sheeps, lions etc. In the case of human beings there are some in whom all physical organs and psychical faculties are fully developed, in case of others, it is not so. Even in the case of celestial state, the celestial beings are of *bhavanavāsins* or of *vyantaras*, who are supposed to live in all three worlds or of *jyotiṣkas* such as suns, moons, planets etc. *vaimānikas* stay in the abode of gods and finally, we refer to the existence of soul in hell, where soul is continuously tormented by heat, cold, hunger etc. These hellish beings inhabit seven successively descending regions underneath the earth. The deeper the layers the soul inhabits the more horrible and unendurable in the life therein.

Prof. S. Gopalan in his outlines of Jainism observes⁴ the following: «The four states of the *Jīvas* described above has impressed on us. The Jain view that there is continuity of consciousness from the lowest of animate beings to the highest stage of perfection in which purity of consciousness is regained, the stage which is clearly far above the ordinary human level. The logic of such a theory of consciousness is that at no stage is any *Jīva* to be despised or looked down, Jainism deserves praise for a such a clarity of thought with reference to soul in its philosophy».

It appears that Jainism divide living beings according to the number of sense organs which they possess and at the same time in accordance with the auspicious or inauspicious conditions, or perfect stage or imperfect condition of the souls. The concept of soul in Jainism covers the entire life principle in the world, it includes the human life, divine bodied souls, plants, vegetation, animals of all types and worms of every type, no life is excluded from the sphere of life-consciousness. This classification of souls as found in Jainism may

4. See p. 139.

appear to be unscientific to a modern mind but when we take into account the age in which such speculative thought on the concept of soul, was given due consideration, so it is marvellous. It is also interesting to note that many ideas of soul such as human life, animal and plant life etc. are common today in the science of biology, botany and zoology in the matter of classification of life etc.

Study of the concept of soul may not be complete without reference to the concept of liberation of *mokṣa* or state of perfection. It may be noted that the very characteristic marks of soul viz. intelligence, perfect knowledge etc. are obscured by extrinsic causes thought they are never destroyed. Defilement of the soul takes place due to *karma*, soul harbours passions of various types and binds itself and moves in the world from one birth to different births. Theory of karma is the keystone of the Jain philosophy. Natural qualities of souls are perfect knowledge and intuition and bliss, but these inborn qualities of soul are weakened or obscured in mundane souls by the very power of *śubha* or *aśubha karma*. Karmic activity takes place in the case of souls under the influence of love, hatred and thus it produces very fine matter which inflows into and binds the soul into this wordly existence. By this result, *karma* is regarded as having eight varieties such as *karma* obscuring knowledge, and faith. *Karma* giving pleasure or pain, deluding *karma* coming in the way of faith, *karma* fixing the span of life, *karma* ordaining the future embodiment, name etc., *karma* fixing the family high or low, and *karma* standing as an impediment in charity, acquisition, enjoyment and power. The law of *karma* is inexorable. The resulting actions cannot be thwarted and they yield rewards already fixed by the nature of actions. It may be noted here that the doctrine of immortality of the soul and consequent belief in reincarnation or rebirth is the central point to the *karma* theory in Jainism as it is in the Upanisadic philosophy and Buddhism. It is well known fact that Jainism holds the view that soul of a human being after death can be born in animal world or in botanical world, it may go to heaven or hell according to the *karma*. It is, therefore, urged that man should try his level best to realise the ultimate truth, viz. *kevala* as advocated in Jainism, by following an ethical code in letter and spirit. The ethical code enunciated in Jainism consists of five minor or major vows, right

faith, knowledge and right conduct etc. and this is quite marvellous for the upliftment of "soul". Theory of *keval jñāna* or perfect knowledge is quite unique in its character in Jainism and it implies omniscient stage of man's progress in his knowledge-pursuit where reality is realised fully. This is possible only in human birth, since Jainism holds the view that the human soul has the potentiality to know all things irrespective of spatial and temporal distance.

The Jain theory of emotions and feelings is clearly discernible in the phenomenological analysis it gives of Jīva though from a transcendental standpoint, Jīva is nothing but pure consciousness, from the empirical point of view, it is seen to be possessed of passions due to the influence of nescience and the basis of all feelings is the passion and this is conspicuously absent in the perfect soul. It may be noted here that involvement in life characterised by passions prevents a man from escaping from the wordly existence in Indian thought in general. Jainism also believes in it. In this connection it worthwhile to refer to the term *leśyā*, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan says that which is connected with the *karma* theory is the doctrine of *Leśyās* of which there are six, the totality of *karman*s taken up by a soul induce in it a transcendental colour or complexion which cannot be perceived by the naked eye, those have a moral bearing. The state of a soul is produced by its inborn nature and the *karma* with which it is associated⁵. In fact the totality of *karma* amalgamated by a soul induces on it, transcendental colour or kind of complexion and this is known as *leśyā*. There is *leśyā* so long as there is an association of the soul with mind. The soul has infinite fold transformations due to infinite fold activities of mind associated with it but these transformations are classified for the sake of convenience into six types which are known as black, blue, grey yellow, red and white *leśyās*, they are thus nothing but states of the soul brought about by the various conditions of the mind. In ultimate analysis, the passions determine the nature of colouration. Jainism regards the colouration of the soul free from passions as pure-white. Many a time the passions darken the soul, the more soul is free from passion less dark in the colour of the soul and the culmination is reached in pure white colouration which

5. History of Indian Philosophy, vol. I, p. 320.

also disappears in the state of liberation of Nirvāṇa with the attainment of the liberation, the souls aspirations for freeing itself from bad influence of *ajīva* (matter) are realised. The Jīva reaches the top of the universe wherefrom there is no fall.

Lastly it may be mentioned that souls are in various stages of evolution towards perfection and as such no one Jīva or soul at whatever higher stage it may be, has any right to interfere with the spiritual progress of any other Jīva at whatever lower stage of evolution it may be. This is nothing but the reverence for life and as such *ahiṃsā* be followed in letter and spirit in case of all souls. This is a grand principle of Jainism and in a way it is the very soul of Jainism.

Thus, the study of the concept of soul in Jainism, though in brief, reveals that Jainism has taken into account various problems connected with the Soul as we find in major Indian philosophical system. In Jainism soul is conceived to be the cause or vehicle of the bodily life and psychical activities of the individual persons, it is an indestructible entity. Moreover, the concept of soul here is envisaged universally to cover the entire life-phase may be animals or vegetation, divine or human beings etc. This is a grand idea about the soul in general and Jainism enunciates ethical code in letter and spirit for the gradual spiritual development of the soul and this is the prime aim of any religion or philosophical system. Jainism fulfils this promise and there by proves to be one of the living religions and philosophical schools in the world.